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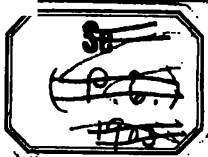
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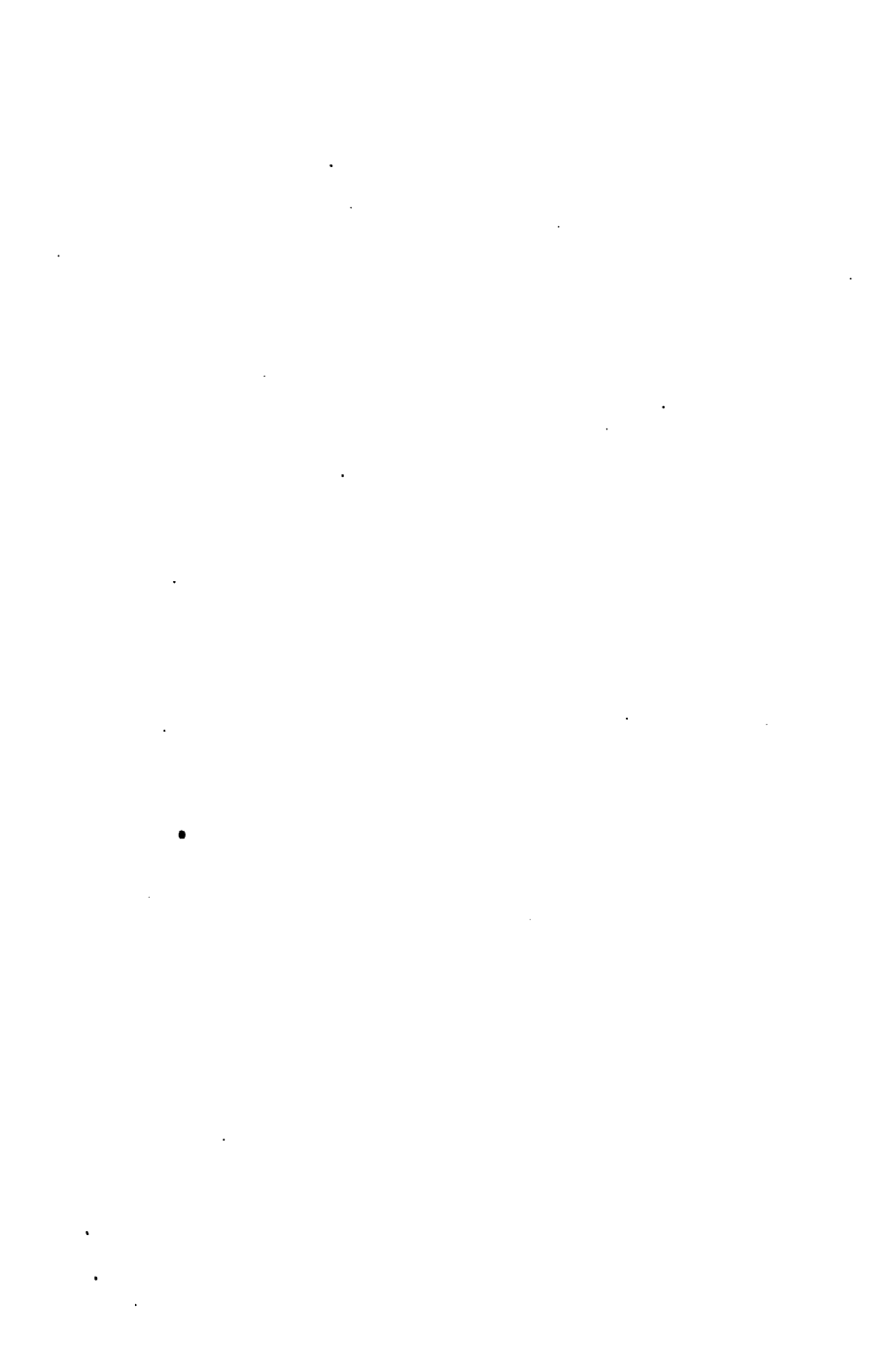
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SINCERITY AND SUBSCRIPTION



SINCERITY AND ° SUBSCRIPTION

*A Plea for Toleration in
the Church of England*

BY
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PREFATORY NOTE

I.

RECENT events have again directed public attention to the formal conditions under which the clergy of the Church of England hold office and fulfil their ministry. For quite intelligible reasons there has sprung up among us a habit of speech with respect to the Prayer-book, which implies serious mental confusion, and may induce very unfortunate results. Moderate men, whether clergy or laity, readily declare themselves to be prepared to stand by the Prayer-book, to desire no departure from its system, to be resolved to maintain and, as far as in them lies, to enforce its observance. It is scarcely excessive to say that the formula of episcopal policy is "The Prayer-book, the whole Prayer-book, and nothing but the Prayer-book," and the simplest layman thinks he can see the

soundness of that formula when he recalls the statutory declaration exacted from every Ordained man, not merely at his Ordination, but on every appointment to office. That declaration, as prescribed in the XXXVIth Canon, is the following :—

“I assent to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and to the Book of Common Prayer, and of the Ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons: I believe the doctrine of the Church of England, as therein set forth, to be agreeable to the Word of God; and in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use the form in the said book prescribed, and none other, except so far as shall be ordered by lawful authority.”

Now this seems explicit enough: but it is sufficiently well known that so far as the least important part of the declaration is concerned, that which pledges the clergyman to use the form in the Prayer-book in his public ministrations, the greatest difficulties have been discovered. Puritans in the 17th century, and

Ritualists in the 20th, from quite different premisses have reached the same conclusion of disobedience, and those Anglicans, who are not Puritans, and would resent the appellation of Ritualists, appear to have agreed upon an explanatory clause, which, without authority of law but in deference to the coercion of necessity, they will append to the statutory declaration. It runs as follows :—

“We affirm our sense of the sacred obligation imposed by the declaration made by the clergy under Canon XXXVI. not to alter the services in the Prayer-book by unsanctioned omissions, or by any additions which hinder the service or which suggest its insufficiency : nor to introduce other services or prayers without the authority of the Bishop.”¹

The legal declaration prohibits changes ; the new clause defines the mode of making changes. It is a curious method of confessing a “ sacred obligation,” but its justification lies in the fact

¹ See *Times*, Wednesday, May 27th, 1903.

that changes must be made. The system of the Elizabethan Prayer-book was even in James I.'s reign partially obsolete in the judgment of so wise and cautious a man as Lord Bacon ; and it is the same Elizabethan Prayer-book, as re-issued at the Restoration, which we still insist upon. Of course Time has silently abrogated some rubrics and modified others ; and an honest clergyman, endowed with an average measure of common sense, and really anxious to do his spiritual work, has no real practical difficulty in the rubrics of the Prayer-book. Bishop Thirlwall's declaration in 1848 is certainly justified by the general experience :—

“Whatever complaints may be heard among ourselves, and whatever reproaches may be cast against us by our adversaries, with regard to the imperfections of our ecclesiastical system, and the bondage, as it has sometimes been termed, of the Church, none can honestly allege that he meets with any impediments arising from this cause, which seriously limit the field of his usefulness, or restrain him from

applying all his faculties to it, or preclude him from hoping for an abundant blessing on his work.”¹

The moment, however, that other considerations than those of common sense and pastoral duty enter into the problem of rubrical obedience, then its solution becomes enormously more difficult. In the interest of what he conceives to be the Catholic character of the Church, the Ritualist selects certain rubrics, and makes their punctilious observance a matter of conscience; in the same interest, he ignores or openly violates other rubrics, which, for reasons of his own, the Protestant exalts as the very pillars of Anglicanism. Bishops address to both the same ineffectual platitudes about “loyalty to the Prayer-book, &c.” The situation is absurd.

II.

Far more serious than the obsolescence of the rubrics is the steadily waxing obsolescence of the formularies themselves. If it is plainly equitable to permit the clergy to limit their “sacred

¹ *Remains*, Vol. I., p. 109.

obligation" to obey the former by a large reserve as to innovations which are not destructive of the system itself, so it would appear to be even more plainly equitable to recognise such a margin of liberty in the interpretation of the latter as is not properly destructive of the Christian Faith. The latter is in truth the more reasonable contention of the two, though both are reasonable.

For, although there may be considerable inconvenience, there is rarely any wounding of conscience involved in insistence upon an obsolete rubric. Such rubrics, for example, as the following might conceivably be revived without hurting any one, though with more or less inconvenience to many :—

So many as intend to be partakers of the Holy Communion shall signify their names to the Curate, at least some time the day before.

The people are to be admonished, that it is most convenient that Baptism should not be administered but upon Sundays, and

other Holy-days, when the most number of people come together, &c.

The Curate of every Parish shall diligently upon Sundays and Holy-days, after the second lesson at Evening Prayer, openly in the Church instruct and examine so many children of his Parish sent unto him, as he shall think convenient, in some part of this Catechism.

And all Fathers, Mothers, Masters, and Dames, shall cause their children, servants, and prentices (which have not learned their Catechism), to come to the Church at the time appointed, and obediently to hear, and be ordered by the Curate, until such time as they have learned all that is here (*i.e.*, in the Catechism) appointed for them to learn.

When any person is sick, notice shall be given thereof to the Minister of the Parish; who, coming into the sick person's house, shall say [the order for the Visitation of the Sick].

Such rubrics evidently presuppose conditions of life which have very generally ceased, but they *could* be revived more or less even now, and their revival would inflict no burden on any one's conscience, but the attempt to perpetuate or revive a doubtful or abandoned sense of doctrinal formularies necessarily injures consciences. If it be clearly understood that such formularies may be used in senses which, however little compatible with their grammatical interpretation, are not properly incompatible with the Christian faith, then it may be a wise course to leave them unaltered; but if their language be plainly and unalterably misleading, if its incongruity with admitted truth be incapable of concealment or mitigation, then it would seem evident that the time has come for altering, or abrogating, statements which could only be used with loss to devotion and injury to intellectual rectitude. The Thirty-nine Articles are now generally allowed to be an example of a partially obsolete confession. The "assent" which the clergy give to that lengthy formulary, containing, it is said, no less than six hundred

distinct theological propositions, is very "general" indeed. At least one of the three Creeds is by most men thought to be so unfortunately expressed as to be actually misleading ; and there are not a few passages in the prescribed services which could not be seriously pressed, though all men admit that, taken as a whole, the public Liturgy of the Church of England is a noble and most precious heritage, perhaps the worthiest instrument of Christian worship the Church has ever possessed.

III.

Recent proceedings in the Convocations of both Provinces following upon some episcopal pronouncements have made it certain that an effort is being made to stiffen subscription in the English Church, by prohibiting in advance any modification of opinion as to one Article of the Creed, which has within the last few months been extensively discussed. Without passing

any judgment on the issues which have been raised, it may be permitted to submit two propositions :

1. That the raising of those issues was the inevitable result of the rapid extension among us of critical and historical science.

2. That any attempt to suppress inquiry, or to prohibit by the strong hand of authority modifications of theological opinion is wrong in itself, and must be mischievous in effect.

The difficulties felt in some quarters with respect to the Birth-Narratives in the first and third Gospels, which are admittedly the basis of the statement in the Creed, cannot fairly be said to be either unreal or slight, and their very nature as relating to the right understanding of the Scriptures precludes the possibility of meeting them by the time-honoured method of an appeal to antiquity. When the Churchmen's Union did me the honour of asking me to preach the Annual Sermon on May 25th, I thought it well to take the opportunity of making a frank statement with respect to subscription as now required from Ordination Candidates. Those who heard the sermon were urgent in desiring

me to publish it, and, in yielding to their wishes, I have thought well, not merely to add these explanations, but also to combine with it another sermon of a more constructive nature, which I had preached the day before in St. Margaret's, Westminster.

H. H. H.



I

SINCERITY AND SUBSCRIPTION

**Preached to the Members of the Churchmen's
Union on Monday, May 25th, 1903, in
St. Stephen's, Walbrook, E.C.**



SINCERITY AND SUBSCRIPTION

FOR WE CAN DO NOTHING AGAINST THE TRUTH, BUT FOR
THE TRUTH.—2 Corinthians xiii. 8.

I. THE revelation of God in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has been very slowly and progressively apprehended, and, as we review the process of apprehension continued now for nearly nineteen centuries, we cannot avoid certain out-standing and deeply significant facts. I propose to invite your attention to some of these, in order that I may build on them some conclusions directly relevant to a discussion of the present situation in the Church of England.

1. Perhaps the first thing that arrests the notice of a thoughtful student of Christian history is its strangely normal aspect. The Church of the Incarnate Truth seems to fall without difficulty under the dominion of whatsoever delusion is at any time prevailing among

men. As the river of God flows through the ages, it takes the colour of the soil. The Divine Society conforms itself with suggestive facility to the secular types of order, of philosophy, even of worship : and so complete is the conformity that sometimes we are hard pressed to vindicate any original and distinctive power in that Gospel, which carries on its front the assurance of perpetual, ever-active, infallible guidance. The Church seems to enjoy no protection from moral confusions, the most repellent to its Founder's spirit, the most injurious to its spiritual mission. It seems to be evident that all *a priori* arguments for ecclesiastical authority based on the presence within the Christian Society of the "Spirit of truth" must be discounted by the surprising fact that, judged by the action of ecclesiastical authority, the Christian Society has often gone astray precisely where, on *a priori* grounds, it might have been expected to take the right course. Two examples shall suffice. Probably, of all the mischievous errors which have cursed human life, none has been more deeply and widely baleful than that "doctrine of devils," as S. Paul brusquely calls it, which stamped family life with the stigma of moral inferiority, and exalted the artificial chastity of the cloister as the way of Christian perfection. Yet it is

notorious that this pernicious error has behind it the weight of ecclesiastical decisions continued through many ages, and does at this moment largely determine the discipline of the Latin and Eastern churches. If not more pestilent in its effects on human life, the error of compelling orthodox belief by physical coercion has been even more fruitful in desolating crime and public scandal. We are, perhaps, so accustomed to assume that persecution is an episode of barbarism that we miss its tremendous gravity as a normal feature of historic Christianity. But at a time when, in the interest of a dogmatic tradition, appeal is being made in many quarters to the *a priori* improbability of the Catholic Church being suffered to fall into error on an article of faith, it cannot be superfluous to point to the inexorable verdict of history on the kindred matter of morals, a proceeding, the legitimacy and relevance of which are manifest at once when it is remembered that sound moral perceptions are everywhere in the New Testament made the conditions and accompaniments of right belief. Nor is it altogether without significance that the most conservative of Churches in point of creed is at this moment apparently the most backward in point of morality: and that the devotional fervour of their Easter worship should easily

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carry Russian Christians to the hellish crimes of massacre, outrage, and plunder.

2. Perhaps the next fact which will compel the thoughtful student's attention will be the futility of ecclesiastical decisions as means for securing identity of creed. It is notorious that every Council of the Church, œcumenical or otherwise, has solemnly disclaimed the intention of altering the transmitted creed, and protested against the charge that nothing less has been the effect of its work. The solemn fiction of identity has reigned from Nicæa to the Vatican. The lengthy formularies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries assume that they are but protecting by more accurate statement the faith of the Apostles, and the most voluminous divines always work on the same assumption. Yet it only needs to contrast the earlier with the later statements and expositions in order to see how pathetically false this assumption is. If there were need of bringing evidence on the point, it might suffice to collect the mutual recriminations of the Churches. Every one, in the opinion of every other, is guilty of innovating on the primitive tradition, and thus destroying, or at least endangering, the integrity of "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." Now, thoughtful Christians have never, perhaps,

altogether been content with the assumption they have been compelled to make : they have drawn the distinction between doctrines essential and doctrines non-essential, and thought that they could vindicate for the first what they could not hope to vindicate for the last. They have fastened upon some venerated summary of the faith, or they have agreed upon some statement of fundamental truth, and proposed it as an unchanging and unchangeable formulary, to be the basis of perpetual agreement. An instance, which will at once come to the mind of every Anglican, is that of the eloquent author of "The Liberty of Prophesying."

JEREMY TAYLOR, when he wrote that famous treatise, was one of a persecuted minority, and his sense of the inherent wrongfulness of forcing conscience was quickened by the discomforts of his lot. He saw clearly the monstrous disturbance of spiritual perspective, caused by the passionate insistence on religious opinions, which marked the age. "How many volumes," he says, "have been written about angels, about immaculate conception, about original sin, when all that is solid reason, or clear revelation, in all these three articles may be reasonably enough comprised in forty lines? And in these trifles and impertinencies men are curiously busy,

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while they neglect those glorious precepts of Christianity and holy life, which are the glories of our religion, and would enable us to a happy eternity." He saw that zeal for doctrinal orthodoxy was curiously compatible with indifference to grave moral faults. "I would fain know," he cries, "why is not any vicious habit as bad, or worse, than a false opinion? Why are we so zealous against those we call heretics, and yet great friends with drunkards, and swearers, and intemperate and idle persons! I am certain that a drunkard is as contrary to God, and lives as contrary to the laws of Christianity, as a heretic : and I am also sure that I know what drunkenness is : but I am not sure that such an opinion is heresy : neither would other men be so sure as they think for, if they did consider it aright, and observe the infinite deceptions, in wise men, and in most things, and in all doubtful questions, and that they did not mistake confidence for certainty."

JEREMY TAYLOR, therefore, aims at destroying the occasion of that insistence on religious opinions, which, in practice, was found to be so demoralising by restricting as narrowly as possible the number of fundamental doctrines, upon which agreement ought to be required as a condition of Christian fellowship. He found

ready to his hand the baptismal formulary of Christendom, the Apostles' Creed, and he proposed it as the sufficient basis of union. "We have no other help in the midst of these distractions and disunions, but all of us to be united in that common term, which as it does constitute the church in its being such, so it is the medium of the communion of saints : and that is the Creed of the Apostles ; and, in all other things an honest endeavour to find out what truths we can, and a charitable and mutual permission to others that disagree from us and our opinions."

JEREMY TAYLOR was far too acute and honest a reasoner not to know that he was ascribing more authority to the Apostles' Creed than his own theory did rightly admit, but he was face to face with an existing anarchy of opinions, and, as a practical man, he had to propose something which might have a chance of securing acceptance, and nothing was better fitted for his purpose than a formulary so widely known, so authoritative, and so comparatively simple. Yet even in that age, before the birth of modern science and criticism, the futility of enforcing even so brief a creed had become manifest. Christendom had broken up into apparently irremediable divisions over the interpretation of

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that Article of the Apostles' Creed which affirmed belief in the Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic, the Oriental, the Arminian, the Calvinist, the sectary, one and all, read a meaning into the words which the rest repudiated. In what sense was the article to be both enforced as essential and accepted as unifying?

3. The permanence of formulæ is seen to be no secure indication of the permanence of the beliefs they are designed to express; in truth, Christian history appears to certify doctrinal development by what we may call the method of recurrent crises. Formulæ and the current interpretation of formulæ become intolerably artificial; there is raised against the established system, doctrinal or liturgical, the deep repugnance of honest and thoughtful men, to whom it no longer seems consistent with self-respect to acquiesce in public confessions and devotions which have ceased to have behind them living convictions. And there will be always at such times an interval of hesitancy and mental distress, while the volume of conscientious discontent is forming. The advocates of change will feel themselves compelled to an involuntary deception; the adherents of things established will fear the loss of their religious securities. And at such times, Christian history certifies

both the frequency and the futility of interventions on the part of ecclesiastical authority.

4. The thoughtful student of the Christian centuries, if his personal belief be robust enough to survive the disappointments which will assuredly meet him on the threshold of his inquiry, will be impressed and consoled by the assimilative power of the Christian Religion, and the indestructible vitality of the primitive Christian conceptions. The Gospel of Christ has assuredly demonstrated its catholic character in this respect, that it can match, enter into, absorb, and be absorbed by every type and stage of ethnic civilisation ; and this astonishing adaptability is prevented from working the final destruction of Christianity itself by the singular persistence of the original elements of the Gospel. The function of the New Testament within the historic Christian Society has been precisely that of restoring to prominence the primitive ideas of Christianity, those, namely, which are bound up with the Founder's Person and Life. The declaration of the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews might be written at the head of Christian history as giving the secret of its perennial fascination and declaring the principle of indestructible continuity which

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inspires it : " Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, yea, and for ever."

II. These general considerations will serve to lead me to a brief discussion of a subject which is now again becoming urgent. I mean the doctrinal subscriptions which are required of Ordination Candidates. Are they, or are they not, such as might reasonably be refused by honest, intelligent, and educated young men, who feel that they have received the vocation of the Holy Spirit to the work of the Ministry ? I may observe generally that it is now admitted by all fair-minded persons that the language of the Anglican formularies cannot in all cases be pressed in an exact or literal sense. The "general assent" to the Thirty-nine Articles is admittedly compatible with a particular repudiation of a good many of them :¹ and the

¹ *E.g.*, Art. VI. describes as "Holy Scripture," "those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church." Yet it is well known that with respect to several of these books (*e.g.*, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon in the Old, Hebrews, Revelation, 2 Peter in the New) there was protracted doubt in the Church.

Art. VII. says roundly, "they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises," yet it is an agreed point now that they did.

Art. VIII. declares Athanasius's Creed to be "proved

Deacon's declaration of unfeigned belief of "all the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament" cannot reasonably be supposed to commit him to the absurdities which would be implied in a rigid understanding of the words.¹ So with regard to the formularies which the clergy are required to use in public worship, it is an agreed point that the language of those formularies is sometimes archaic and obsolete. It would be extremely unfair to hold the clergy to a belief in the so-called "damnatory clauses" of the Athanasian Creed—clauses which seemed objectionable even to the stern Calvinists of the Westminster Assembly,² which have been repudiated by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." Hardly anybody believes *that*.

Arts. IX.—XVII. bristle with disputable propositions.

Art. XVIII. is only tolerable in a quite non-natural sense.

Art. XXXIV. plainly assumes the conditions of the præ-Toleration epoch.

Art. XXXV. will not be readily accepted by any one who has *read* the books of Homilies.

Art. XXXVII. affirms that misleading parallel between the Jewish and English Monarchies which the *Canons* bind on Anglicans under pain of *ipso facto* excommunication, but which everybody now repudiates.

¹ It is notorious that there are contradictory accounts of the same event often found in the historical books. Even the most abject Bibliolater could hardly believe unfeignedly these.

² v. Lightfoot's *Journal of the Assembly of Divines*, Aug. 18, 1643. "Then was there a long agitation about

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diated with something like scorn by some of our greatest divines,¹ and which were formally explained in a non-natural sense by the Convocation of Canterbury thirty years ago.² It would,

translating the creeds anew, and about setting some gloss upon the preface and conclusion of Athanasius' Creed, which seems to be something harsh; but at last it was concluded that the creeds should be printed, at the end of the thirty-nine articles; so the determining of these matters referred thither" (v. *Works*, ed. Pitman, vol. XIII., p. 10).

¹ Of the twenty-seven Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Rubrics and Ritual of the Church of England, seventeen signed protests against the recommendation of their colleagues to retain the Athanasian Creed in the public service of the Church, and to append to it an explanatory Rubric. Dean Stanley gave sixteen reasons for his protest. The ninth was this:—"Because the use of this Creed, and of those clauses especially, has been condemned by some of the most illustrious divines of the Church of England, such as Chillingworth, Baxter, Bishop Jeremy Taylor, Archbishop Tillotson, Archbishop Secker, Dr. Hey, Dr. Arnold, Dr. Burton, Bishop Lonsdale" (v. *Life and Letters of Dean Stanley*, vol. II., p. 233).

We may add the names of Bishop Thirlwall (v. *Remains*, vol. III., p. 247f.), who had an unfavourable opinion of the dogmatic definitions of the Creed: Archbishop Magee (v. *Christ the Light of all Scripture*, pp. 307-342), who was less hostile to the Creed itself, but equally adverse to the damnatory clauses: and Dr. Hort (v. *Life and Letters*, vol. I., p. 458: vol. II., pp. 128, 140), who thoroughly disliked the Creed, and refers to it with marked contempt.

² In May, 1873, the Convocation of Canterbury adopted a Synodical Declaration, which is printed in the *Life and Letters of Dean Stanley*, vol. II., p. 231.

I think, be unfair to press the language of the "proper preface" for Whitsunday, as if the clergyman who used it were thereby pledged to a particular interpretation of the narrative in Acts ii.¹

These instances will, perhaps, suffice to indicate both the fact and the character of the general understanding that does undoubtedly exist among us as to the measure of obligation attaching to the Anglican formularies. But, when all is said, we must face the Creeds. Here, at least, the mass of men are disposed to think there can be no margin of divergence. The Ordination Candidate, it is contended, must give an *ex animo* assent to every article in its obvious literal sense; but it is precisely in connection with the Creeds that the present difficulty has arisen. With respect to all subscriptions made at Ordination, I venture to think that two things ought always to be understood. On the one hand, every formula of doctrine varies its sense from age to age, and, therefore, must be assumed always to be subscribed in what may be called

¹ Probably the prevailing opinion among the educated clergy just now is hostile to the traditional view expressed in the Whitsunday "proper preface." See the careful article on the "Gift of Tongues" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. IV., p. 793, by Dr. Robertson, now Bishop of Exeter.

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its current or tolerated sense. The most rigidly orthodox persons among us are as little able to dispense with the liberty secured by this proposition as those whom they criticise. It is certain that the sense now placed by all Anglicans on such Articles of the Apostles' Creed as the descent into hell, the ascension into heaven, the Holy Catholic Church, and the resurrection of the body differs most widely from that which was insisted upon in the Middle Ages, and even so recently as the first half of the last century. To appeal to the mere words of the Creed, therefore, and to make imputations of dishonesty on no better foundation than an apparent verbal divergence is a proceeding which argues either very great disingenuousness, or very little intelligence.¹

¹ Cf. Hammond's observations on the Descent into Hell in his *Practical Catechism*. "Though it be a Christian's duty to believe every part and article of this Creed delivered down to us by the Church from the Apostles, as a form or summary of sound doctrine, . . . yet I conceive the agreeing on some one sense, wherein to interpret every article of it is not so absolutely necessary, but that some one of them, as this of Christ's descent, may be taken in a latitude, and either not determined to any one interpretation, or resolved to be capable of more; and so the words be received, the particular sense one way or other, will be indifferent to them that sincerely follow that light which is offered to them" (v. *Practical Catechism*, p. 315. Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology). The erudite Barrow in his

It is never the Creed, but only some particular understanding of the Creed, which is being pressed. On the other hand, subscription must be assumed to be required and made *reasonably*, and it is not *reasonable* to ask, nor would it be *reasonable* to promise, at the age of twenty-three, a fixed and final conviction on any subjects, least of all, on matters of theological belief, which are manifestly sensitive beyond all other matters to the state of human knowledge, and the prevailing opinions of science and philosophy. Therefore an Ordination Candidate making the subscriptions required by law need not molest his conscience with the irrelevant

Sermon on the same Article speaks with refreshing candour and reasonableness as to the largeness of interpretation which was legitimate. "Perhaps," he says of the Authors of the Article, "they might intend some notion not certain, or not true, following some conceits then passable among divers, but not built upon any sure foundation (like that of the millennium: and the necessity of infants communicating, &c., which were anciently in great vogue, but are now discarded), and since, to speak roundly, their bare authority, whoever they were (for that doth not appear), could not be such, as to oblige us to be of their minds, whatever they did mean or intend; they perhaps were such, to whom we might owe much reverence, but should not be obliged to yield an entire credence to their opinions" (v. *Works*, vol. V., p. 415). It is rather humbling that the seventeenth century should be able to give precedents of theological liberality which the twentieth finds it hard to follow!

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anxiety that at some future time he may change his religious opinions, but ought to limit his self-examination to the single point, whether or not at the time of Ordination he can honestly subscribe. I am the more confident in the soundness of this position because the Church of England appears to assume that the clergy will be a learned and learning body. Nothing could exceed the solemnity with which the obligation of theological study is pressed on the candidate for Ordination. He is exhorted to be "studious" in "reading and learning the Scriptures," and, with this object in view, "to forsake and set aside (as much as he may) all worldly cares and studies." He is required to promise publicly to be "diligent" in "reading of the holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh." Now if this obligation be seriously taken to heart, if the young clergyman apply himself in theological studies under modern conditions, one result may be foretold with certainty. His religious beliefs will undergo great modifications and alterations. In many cases he will be led to change his religious standpoint, to abandon convictions in which he had been trained, to see all the elements of current Christianity in a new

perspective. And all this revolution of ideas may proceed without involving him in any essential disloyalty to the religion of Christ, nay, may be the direct consequence of his loyal eagerness to fulfil the obligations which he accepted at Ordination. None the less will such a man lie open to the invective of less conscientious people as one who has shown himself unfaithful to his Ordination promises.

It is related of the famous Cambridge teacher, JOSEPH MEADE, that he was accustomed to treat his college pupils in a somewhat unusual fashion. Instead of making them attend the normal courses of lectures, he would appoint them a daily task of study. "In the evening they all came to his chamber to satisfy him that they had performed the task he had set them. The first question which he used then to propound to every one in his order was : '*Quid dubitas ?*' 'What doubts have you met in your studies to-day?' ; for he supposed that to doubt nothing and to understand nothing were verifiable alike."¹

The seventeenth century Cambridge don was wiser than some of our twentieth century bishops,² who are hastening to announce to the

¹ v. Masson's *Life of Milton*, vol. I., p. 126.

² *E.g.*, the Bishops of Bristol and Norwich.

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world that they will tolerate in their Ordination Candidates no doubt, where doubt, for the modern theological student, is inevitable, and, because inevitable, therefore legitimate.¹ Doubt on those articles of the Creed, to which public attention has recently been directed, appears to me to be inevitable, because it is connected not with theology, primarily at least, but with exegesis. Even the Creeds draw their claim to Christian acceptance from the fact that they are demonstrably faithful summaries of the witness of the New Testament. This is the precise teaching of the Anglican Articles. "The three Creeds," so runs the VIIIth Article, "ought thoroughly to be received and believed, for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." The principle here enunciated is sound, however questionable may be the particular application.² Certain articles of the

¹ v. Note at the end of the Sermon.

² Archbishop Magee's First Pastoral Charge:—"It is at least clear that our Church asserts for herself the right to alter the Creeds, when she declares as her only reason for receiving them that 'they may be proved by most certain warrant of Holy Scripture.' In these words her assent, and, therefore, the continuance of it, is conditioned on one thing and one thing only—her conviction of the agreement of those Creeds with Scripture. Her right to assent on the ground of Scriptural proof clearly implies her right to dissent on the ground of Scriptural disproof. Unless, indeed, we maintain that, having once

Creed—one article in particular—have been criticised, not from the side of any *a priori* objection to the supernatural, not from any desire to rationalise unlawfully a Divine Revelation, certainly not from any specific dislike of the doctrines at stake, but because the New Testament as read by modern scholars does not appear to yield so clear a testimony as the Christian tradition assumes.

The critical analysis of the documents induces in religious and thoughtful minds the question whether or not the declarations of the Creed are borne out by an honest exegesis. This being the nature of the doubts, it is sufficiently evident

assented to the Creeds on the ground of their accordance with Holy Writ, she may never reconsider this assent: an assertion which could only be justified on the ground that the Church of England not only claims to be, but is, infallible—which certainly will not be alleged by those who deny her right to deal with the Creeds. Of course, it is another and a very different question whether she should ever attempt to exercise the right she thus claims. Like all other rights, this can only be exercised under penalties for the misuse of it: under most tremendous penalties in the case of the Creeds. Nevertheless, she does most distinctly claim this right. She does, by implication, most distinctly assert that in her capacity of guardian for her children of the Faith—which is not necessarily the same thing with being guardian of the Creeds—she has the right, though at her own peril, to modify the Creeds, or any part of them, as God's Word shall seem to her to require" (v. *Christ the Light of all Scripture*, p. 311).

that they cannot reasonably be dealt with by an appeal to ecclesiastical authority. It is plainly futile to meet difficulties affecting the documents by adducing a catena of ecclesiastical decisions and patristic opinions, which take the documents for granted. A philosophic view of history, especially perhaps of religious history, seems to require the belief that what has been called illusion has been a potent and valuable factor in the slow evolution of truth. Thus it has been freely urged by orthodox divines that the illusion as to Christ's Second Advent, under which the Apostolic Church was permitted to take shape and grow strong, was directly ministerial to that sustained enthusiasm of faith, and that heroic contempt of material advantage which were indispensable if the first converts should endure the trials which came to them. In like manner, it has been contended with great force that the strange exaltation of the Redeemer's Mother, beginning, perhaps, within the precincts of the Apostolic Age itself, and proceeding by regular progressions to extravagances which all educated Christians agree to deplore, did for many ages have a salutary influence on men's minds in leading them to new and loftier notions as to the true dignity of the female sex. Other instances will occur to

you, and all may, perhaps, contribute to our present guidance at least the removal of the very natural reluctance which we feel to admit the possibility of illusion with respect to the central beliefs of Christendom. I repeat that the difficulties which have been raised in connection with certain Articles of the Creed are, for Christian men, concerned primarily not with doctrine, but with exegesis. The anxiety of these men is not to overthrow the authority of the New Testament, but to affirm its actual testimony, and this, in the present state of knowledge, seems to some of them to require some modification in the sense attached to certain clauses in the Creed. A difficulty of exegesis implies much more than, perhaps, is generally understood. It raises the solemn issue of a man's intellectual self-respect. Allow if you will, and as I, for one, think you ought, that if the vital truth of the Incarnation of God in Christ—the very constituting faith of the Christian Church—be firmly held, it cannot be a matter of great moment in itself by what mode or method that mystery is thought to have been historically effected, and that Christian men, acquiescing in an inevitable agnosticism, should bury their thoughts on that secondary matter in silence, and devote themselves to the

study and application of the central Truth itself ; still, inasmuch as the specific assertion of the Creed, to which exception has been taken, manifestly affirms an understanding of the New Testament, which is, for quite legitimate reasons, challenged, and which an honest Christian student may find himself unable to accept, it seems to me to follow plainly that, for such a man, the issue must present itself in the gravest possible shape. What ought to be the attitude of the Church of Christ to such men as these, whose case I have described ? Does not the declaration of S. Paul, with which I prefaced my sermon, suggest the answer of toleration ? " We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth." We cannot so far forget the lessons of Christian History as to suppose that the Christian Religion has any interest in resisting the process by which traditional beliefs are accommodated to fresh discoveries of truth. We, of the Church of England, at least, have earned the right to say with the Apostle that " we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully ; but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Are we, in an unworthy panic, to be hustled into

a repressive procedure, against which our whole history warns us? Are we, as public teachers and *a fortiori* as honest students of theology, to accept in our Creed conditions as to both those characters which may prohibit sincerity in ourselves, and must destroy confidence in others? Is the English Clergyman to be tied down to the opinions and sacrificed to the fears of the uninstructed and sometimes fanatical multitude? "It is intolerable"—wrote Mr. Henry Sidgwick as long ago as 1870¹—"that he [the pastor] should be chained down (I do not mean by law, but by common opinion as to his duty) to perpetual agreement with them [his flock]. In a natural state of things, he ought to be the first to state distinctly, while others are only obscurely feeling, the incongruity between the prayers he has to read and the real beliefs of his generation: and when the time is ripe for the removal of this incongruity, he ought to take a prominent part in its removal." There are some other words of Mr. Sidgwick which seem to me so eminently true and relevant that I shall adopt them as the conclusion of my sermon. "If each minister, maintaining de-

¹ *The Ethics of Conformity and Subscription*, by Henry Sidgwick, M.A. Williams and Norgate, 1870.

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liberately that a certain amount of divergence was legitimate and inevitable, would openly avow his own, a great gain would be achieved. On the one hand, the reasonableness of the principle would, I think, appear after argument, even to persons who at first were startled by its laxity. On the other hand, the attention of the laity would be directed to the value of sincerity in devotional expression. We should get rid entirely of the sophistries and evasions which now, I think, do more than anything else to tarnish the clerical reputation for veracity." For us, Anglicans, be this our act of faith, be this our formula of policy : " We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth."

NOTE

THE authority in the New Testament for the Virgin Birth of Christ is far less conclusive than is ordinarily assumed to be the case. Even if the formidable discrepancies between the two Birth-narratives be ignored, and the whole question be reduced to the single and unavoidable issue of interpretation, there is no mean justification for doubt. In both narratives the agency of angels is affirmed, but while in the one that agency is said to be realised in dreams, in the other it is left unexplained. It cannot be said to be a very violent procedure to assume that both the angelic approaches to S. Joseph (S. Matt. i. 20 ; ii. 13, 19) and to S. Mary (S. Luke i. 26—38), were made in dreams, but it certainly has a very important influence on our understanding of the record of the Annunciation. Again, it is now very generally admitted by divines of unquestioned orthodoxy that we may understand Evangelical narratives otherwise than the Evangelists understood them themselves. Thus, the narrative of our Lord's Temptation, which "no doubt the author of S. Matthew's Gospel" supposed to form "three distinct visible scenes," is held by that admirable expositor, the late Dr. Latham, to "have been a representation of our Lord's inward conflicts, clothed by Him in a garb of outward imagery, that they might be the better understood" (v. *Pastor Pastorum*, p. 118). If this be a legitimate treat-

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ment of the narrative of the Temptation, it cannot be less legitimate when applied to the narrative of the Annunciation: and, if it be so applied, that narrative, standing alone, becomes a very frail foundation to sustain the statement of the Creed. Dr. Sanday has satisfied himself that the narrative in S. Luke "is ultimately traceable to the Virgin herself, in all probability through the little circle of women who were for some time in her company." Dreams, or intuitions, or mental conflicts related at second hand by devout women, the best informed in the world, are no very secure basis for an immense affirmation. The critics seem agreed in attaching comparatively little weight to the narrative in S. Matthew, so that the whole burden of proof is made to depend on that in S. Luke. Of course if the whole tenour of the New Testament confirmed that narrative, its actual slightness would not greatly matter, but the contrary is apparently and admittedly the case. It is literally true that apart from what Dr. Sanday calls the "Supplemental Matter" in S. Matt. i., ii., and S. Luke i., ii., there is *nothing* to suggest anything abnormal in Christ's Birth, and much to suggest the opposite. The great theological truth of the Incarnation, which, somewhat differently apprehended, indeed, but always with absolute assurance, pervades the writings of S. Paul and S. John is nowhere connected with a miraculous Birth (see Dr. Sanday's Article in Hastings' *Dictionary*, Vol. II., p. 643). There are a good many points in the critical treatment of the Gospels which want clearing up, and the time has not yet come for any final decision on the momentous questions at stake: but how any candid person acquainted with the facts can deny either (a) the legitimacy of doubt as to the

Virgin Birth, or (β) the compatibility of such doubt with a genuine belief in the Incarnation, or (γ) the proper separableness of the Incarnation from any specific theory as to its mode, however ancient and attractive, or (δ) the obligation of honest men not to affirm as fact more than the evidences adduced seem to them to allow,—seems to me very astonishing. The clauses in the Creed must be supposed to affirm the two truths about our Lord on which the Apostles in their writings lay emphasis, His true manhood, and His essential Deity. Beyond that twofold affirmation the clauses ought not to be pressed. “Born of the Virgin Mary” in the Apostles’ Creed means neither more nor less than S. Paul’s phrases, “born of the seed of David according to the flesh,” “born of a woman.” There can be no doubt, I think, that one of the difficulties attaching to any fair discussion of questions connected with the Person of our Saviour is the irrelevant but most natural intrusion of devout sentiment, and the most just dread of even seeming to countenance any derogation from His Divine dignity. In the less important but not unconnected discussion as to the “brethren” of Christ the same difficulty, though to a less degree, has been experienced. Dr. Mayor affirms his belief in the “miraculous conception” of Christ, but he decisively repudiates every non-natural theory as to His “brethren.” His protest against *a priori* reasonings in the sphere of interpretation carries farther, perhaps, than he would approve. “Even if the language of the Gospels had been entirely neutral on this matter, it would surely have been a piece of high presumption on our part to assume that God’s Providence must always follow the lines suggested by our notions of what is seemly: but when every conceivable barrier has been placed in the way of this

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interpretation by the frequent mention of the brothers of the Lord, living with His mother and in constant attendance upon her : when He is called her first-born son, and when S. Matthew goes into what we might have been inclined to think almost unnecessary detail in fixing a limit to the separation between husband and wife : can we characterise it otherwise than as a contumacious setting up of an artificial tradition above the written Word, if we insist upon it that "brother" must mean, not brother, but either cousin or one who is no blood-relation at all ; that "first-born" does not imply other children subsequently born ; that the limit fixed to separation does not imply subsequent union ? The conclusion then, to which our discussion leads, is that James the Lord's brother was son of Joseph and Mary." [v. "The Epistle of St. James," p. xxxv.] This view of Christ's "brethren" does certainly make appreciably more probable what may be called the "normal" hypothesis as to His parentage.

II

THE
TWOFOLD WITNESS TO CHRIST

S. John xv. 26-27.

Preached on the Sunday after Ascension Day
(May 24th, 1903), in St. Margaret's,
Westminster

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of Me: and ye also bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning.—S. John xv. 26-27.

CHRIST has just spoken of the strange misconceptions which will gather about Himself, and about His followers, of the strange hatred which He, pursuing His quest as the World's Redeemer, had raised against Himself, and which indeed was on the eve of its most dreadful expression, and now He declares for the comfort of the disciples, bewildered and dismayed by His disclosures, the means by which, in spite of misconceptions and hatreds, He will secure in the world complete and perpetual vindication.

The postulate of their assurance is a fact on which He pledges His credit—the coming of the Holy Spirit. As they sat with the Master in the upper room, the Apostles were so many individuals, united indeed by a common sentiment of affection to Christ, linked to one another by the thousand subtle connections of

comradeship in life and work, but still inexorably individuals. Christ tells them that a Divine Power is about to visit them from above, which shall weld them into a new and mystic fellowship, that they will cease to be so many individuals merely, and become a Church, every one of them bound to every other by the presence in all of "the Spirit of truth," whom Christ, triumphant and reigning, will send forth from the Father. This, I say, is the postulate that the Apostles have to make, this the demand upon their faith which, at that dolorous juncture in Christ's fortunes and theirs, He advances. "When the Comforter is come whom I will send unto you from the Father." This event, He says, will enable a twofold witness, strong enough in its distinctive but co-operating persuasiveness, to overcome the prejudice of the world, and to convince men of the truth of the Gospel.

On the one hand, the Apostles will be encouraged and illumined so that they shall become, in the truest sense, witnesses of Christ; on the other hand, always working with them, and certifying His presence by many tokens, will be "the Spirit of truth." S. Peter's recorded words, spoken before the high priest, are a luminous commentary on Christ's promise. He stands in a position of difficulty and danger

undismayed and clear-headed. The timorous peasant of yesterday is the lion-hearted martyr of to-day : and the witness he delivers is twofold : he relates the fact, for which he can vouch, and he points boldly to the corroborating testimony of actual experience.

“But Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging Him on a tree. Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. And we are witnesses of these things ; and so is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him.”

2. It is well for us sometimes to review the evidences on which we rest our religious confidence. Especially at a time of severe mental distress, when the bearings of the ship of faith seem to be lost, and we are adrift on a wild sea, under a frowning sky from which the pilot stars have failed—in such a time as this, when, from many sides, the belief of the Church is boldly, almost triumphantly questioned, it seems to me that we do well, humbly and reverently as befits men engaged about so sacred a task, but frankly and honestly as the task requires, to ask what are the bases of our Christian

faith. In our text, it seems to me that the abiding and adequate foundations of discipleship are stated. There are two distinctive and co-operating authorities, the one external, a voice from the past, the witness of the Apostles to the facts of the Creed, the witness of history enshrined in the New Testament ; the other internal, a voice in the present, the witness of the Holy Spirit to the truth of the Apostolic testimony, the witness enshrined in the experience of Christians as a body, and as individuals. Philosophy, no doubt, has its place in the completed scheme of Christian Apologetics : but, so far as the distinctively Christian elements of the Creed are concerned, philosophy must receive its materials from history, and suspend its verdict on the facts until the facts have been sufficiently certified. The New Testament, as the summary of Apostolic witness, stands in the forefront ; when, by every legitimate means within our power, we have reached the true historic content of the New Testament, we are in a position to construct a theology, not before. This is the reason why such gravity attaches to the inquiries of the Biblical critic, and the scientific historian. They are making clear to us the original testimony of the Apostles. It is not surprising if the process arouses much anxiety

and even provokes, in some quarters, an actual resentment. Time brings changes on all things, and the most sacred of human possessions has enjoyed no exemption from the common fortune, nay, it were not untrue to say, perhaps, that the very vigilance with which the Church has guarded its treasure, has made more difficult the recovery of its primitive character. The New Testament emerges from the crucible of criticism, textual and historic, not without alteration. In clearing off the dust of the "Ages of Faith" the original portrait of the World's Redeemer is given back to us, and I will not deny that there is a measure of change. Let me point my moral with an illustration.

In Westminster Abbey we have among our treasures, an ancient and beautiful painting of King Richard II., which adorns the southern wall of the sanctuary. That picture, as it now exists, is a triumph of careful and thorough treatment, which stripped off no less than two later paintings which had been super-imposed on the mediæval portrait, and almost wholly concealed its beauty. There is the shock of change inevitable in the recovery of forgotten truth. The familiar perversion will become consecrated in the mind, until to reject it, even in the interest of the truth itself, will bear the

aspect of impiety. The portrait of the Redeemer painted by Apostles on the canvas of the Gospels is, like that of the English king, given back to us, in some respects, it may be, changed, but surely more winning and gracious, more apparently Divine than ever. The historic evidence on which the belief of Christians depends was never, as it seems to me, so strong as it is to-day, because never before was it so honestly stated and appraised. Putting aside what may be called open questions, which await answer at the hands of competent scholars, and confining ourselves to the broad agreement of the learned as to the New Testament, it seems to me that history gives to faith all that history can give, or faith can want. And, for myself, I would add this further observation, trite enough, perhaps, and yet always fresh as a personal confession. The New Testament is best realised as unique after it has been frankly studied as normal. Leave all theories of inspiration outside your study of the records, which contain all the knowledge we may have of the Life of Christ, and, in spite of yourself, you will be driven to conclude that there is no extravagance in the old Christian belief that the authors and compilers of those records were uniquely aided and inspired. And when you

find in the book itself the explicit connection together of apostolic witness and supernatural assistance, you will be little disposed to deny that the book justifies that theory of its origin.

3. The most convincing external authority, however, can never create faith. There is deep reasonableness in the words of Christ. "No man can come unto Me except the Father which sent Me draw him. . . . Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto Me." There must be an answering movement from within, a Divine authentication of the external message communicated directly to the spirit of man, and inducing conviction: and this, says Christ, shall be the case. The Apostles are to know that as they deliver their testimony to men, the "Spirit of truth" is silently co-operating with them, making possible to sin-darkened eyes the Vision of God, opening the deaf ears of the soul to the message of life, "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." More than this: the outward message, accepted under the inward coercion of the Spirit, will reveal its Divine character by worthy consequences; and thus belief will find its perennial sustenance in actual

experience. Read the text as a formula expressing what has, as a matter of fact, been the course of events. There has been the continually sustained witness of the apostolic society. The visible Church, which came into being as a result of the preaching of the Apostles, has renewed their testimony, age after age, on the earth. With more or less fidelity the primitive message has been handed on, and to-day, wherever the Church exists, men must make their count with the Christian tradition. And, throughout the whole period, there has been in process the work of the "Spirit of truth," taking up the tradition and bringing it home as a living faith to individuals, a power shaping character and ordering conduct, and thus, of necessity, building up an accumulated testimony of experience, itself the final test and the weightiest sanction of the outward creed. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall bear witness of Me : and ye also bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning."

4. It is, I think, evident in what sense Christianity is a final revelation, and in what sense it may truly be described as a progressive education

in the knowledge of truth. "He shall bear witness of Me," says Christ of the "Comforter": "ye shall bear witness of Me," He says to the chosen companions of His earthly life. What is the difference which manifestly exists between these co-operating and distinctive testimonies? The subject of both is one and the same—the Incarnate Son of God, but the nature of these diverse testimonies is as different as the method. The incommunicable task of the Apostles was to transmit to succeeding ages the faithful portrait of the "Son of Man": that task they fulfilled in the preaching which remains on record in the New Testament. The function of the "Spirit of truth" is didactic and interpretative. "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come," so runs the Gospel, "He shall guide you into all the truth: . . . He shall glorify Me: for He shall take of Mine, and shall declare it unto you." We are, then, authorised to regard Christian history as, from one point of view, a continuous process of discovery, a growth in the knowledge of Christ, an application of Christ's Message to fresh conditions of human living, an appreciation, deeper and juster as the ages pass, of the resources of the Gospel. And thus two very remarkable facts will emerge into prominence. On the one hand, the Church will always be

shifting its attitude towards the problems of human life, abandoning positions once confidently maintained, absorbing ideas at first vehemently resisted, drawing within its range an ever larger and more various mass of social phenomena, enriching its thought and multiplying its activities under the silent but unceasing pressures of experience, in a word, the general aspect of Christian history will be that of a bewildering inconsistency. On the other hand, the Founder will become ever more manifestly the "Alpha and Omega" of the Religion. Every age will find in Him the solution of its peculiar problems : every stage and type of civilisation will find in His Gospel the message of its own redemption : every human life, bringing to Him its inexorably distinctive needs, shall receive from Him their true satisfaction. Over all the world through the successive centuries His words will be justified : "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Myself." We, to-day, reviewing the wreckage of so much that once seemed built for eternity—churches, theologies, casuistries, even creeds—can take up the declaration of the first age, and make it our own. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, yea, and for ever." The promise of Ascensiontide comes to us across the generations with a strange and ap-

parent relevance : we have indeed often pinned our hopes on other things, investing with His attributes what were but His transitory tabernacles, and when they failed us, we were lost in fear ; but He Himself remains, as He promised, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Still, as at the first, when one revelation of Himself is ended, "a cloud receives Him out of our sight," and still His very failure from our sight is the pledge of His return in new and yet more blessed fashion.

5. I submit, therefore, that in our present perplexities there is, when we calmly face them with the New Testament before us, nothing that really is inconsistent with what we were commanded to expect, nothing that properly invalidates our Christian discipleship. Has either of the promised witnesses failed us? Take the outward witness of the Apostles as it has reached us in the New Testament : is that evidence disproved, or explained away? and does the historic revelation, as we apprehend it to-day, seem an inadequate or exhausted message? I take at random from the critics such a confession as this. "That Jesus' message is so great and so powerful lies in the fact that it is so simple and on the other hand so rich ; so simple as to be exhausted in each of the

leading thoughts which He uttered : so rich that every one of these thoughts seems to be inexhaustible, and the full meaning of the sayings and parables beyond our reach. But more than that—He Himself stands behind everything that He said. His words speak to us across the centuries with the freshness of the present. It is here that that profound saying is truly verified : ‘Speak, that I may see thee.’”

Those are the words of Adolf Harnack, and they are taken from the book, to which the Bishop of London made allusion last Sunday in this pulpit, “What is Christianity?” Historical criticism, I admit frankly, has destroyed authority in a *soi-disant* infallible Church, and, not less, in a sacred volume held to be verbally inspired, but so far as the central message of the Gospel is concerned, the Message uttered by and in Jesus Christ, historical criticism—so far as I can apprehend its effect—sets the primitive truth before us a clearer, richer, Diviner thing than ever. Take the inward witness of the “Spirit of truth,” renewed in every generation, and granted to every believer. Has that evidence failed once through the Ages? The Christian Church is with us to-day, demonstrating the continuous vitality of the Christian Tradition. It is mere matter

of fact that through all this long period of nearly nineteen centuries, under an infinite variety of circumstances, the outward, transmitted message has secured that answering witness within men's hearts, which has created the convictions on which discipleship reposes, and by which the Christian Life is determined. Leave the past, and face the present. Christ's words carry with unlesened validity to our case also. Is the "Spirit of truth" bearing witness to Christ still? Is that sacred Figure of the Gospel withdrawn from the dim, deep haze of its remote distance, and brought near to us in the blessed consciousness of living fellowship, a dear and present Lord? Are those words, spoken in Palestine ages since, spoken again with fresh and luminous power by a Divine Monitor within, and made for us also oracles of discipline, of guidance, and of hope? Do we confess still the truth of the Apostle's direct appeal to individual experience—"The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God : and if children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ : if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him" ? Let any man yield himself to the persuasions of that inward witness to the truth of the Gospel, and take for his rule of life the Example and Teaching of Jesus Christ ; let him

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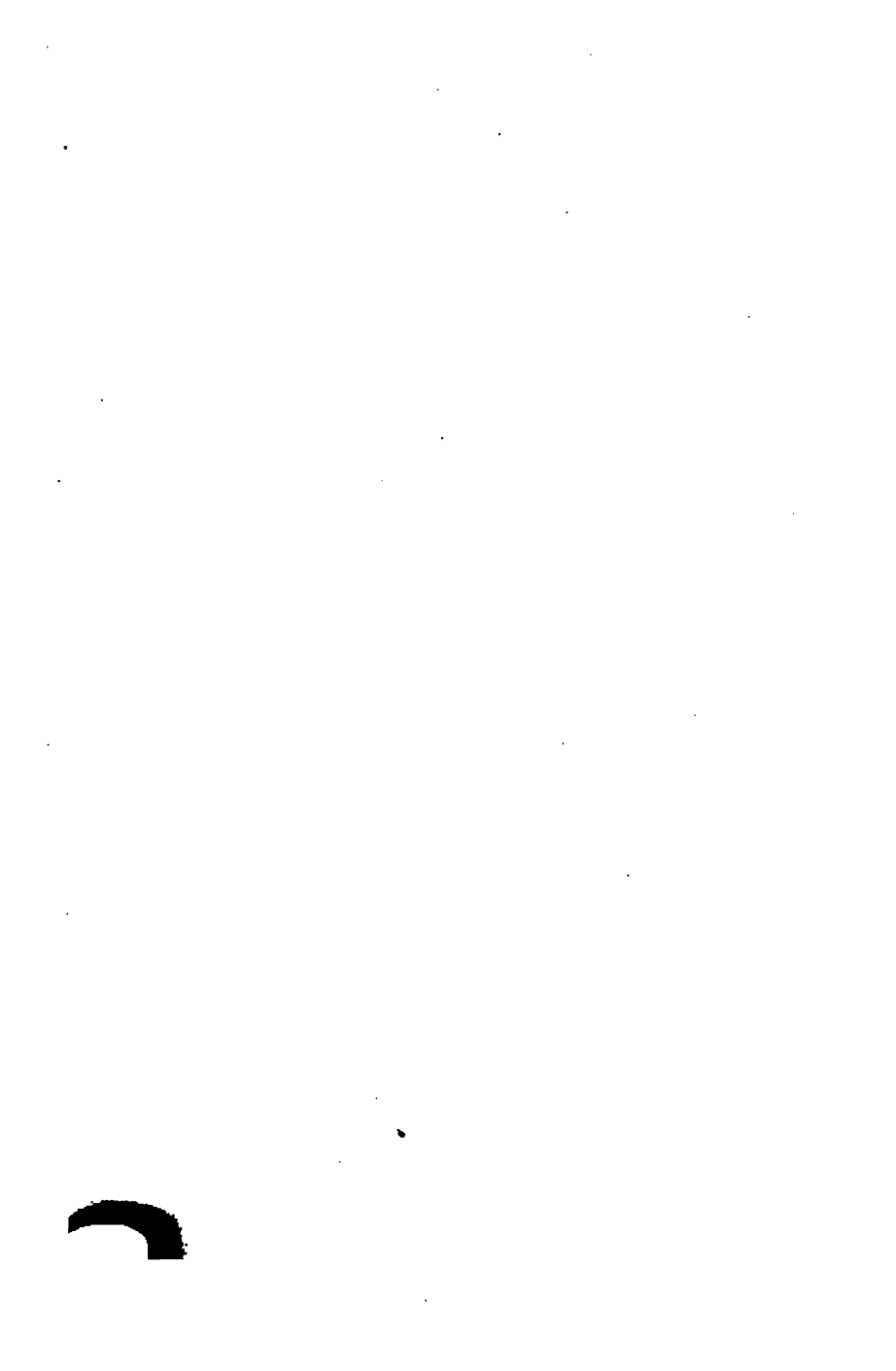
adventure so far as to confess discipleship, and to worship the Crucified ; let him act on the Assumption of Faith, that the Master is, indeed, at hand, living, powerful, gracious ; let him, in one word, become a Christian, and is it not the most certain thing in the world that he will become a better man, worthier of men's trust, a new power of blessing in the world ? This evidence, also, remains to us unshaken, as cogent, as Divine as ever : the evidence of the familiar and inexplicable fact, that "if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature : the old things are passed away ; behold, they are become new."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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